

U.S.-CHINESE
MILITARY TIES?

by Michael Pillsbury

Few subjects have been as shrouded in mystery as U.S.-Chinese relations since 1971, when Henry Kissinger emerged from his dramatic secret trip to Peking. While exchange visits of groups of weightlifters and dentists, and even Presidents, have become routine, almost nothing is known about the actual nature of the high-level discussions between the two sides. Except when the Shanghai Communiqué or some event briefly opened the door, complete secrecy has been the rule—so much so that the number of American officials who have seen the transcripts of the highest-level talks can safely be said to number a mere handful.

Once or twice, newspapers and magazines in the West have reported, from official sources, Chinese interest in American military assistance and in the purchase of military or intelligence equipment. These reports have never been confirmed by either side. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union has turned this issue into a serious propaganda theme, charging repeatedly that the United States and China are in a phase of growing military and intelligence collusion.

In the article that follows, a Rand analyst who studies Chinese defense policies and has personal contacts on all three sides of the Peking-Washington-Moscow triangle, addresses this issue and considers its potential risks and potential gains. While this article is at times hypothetical, it should not be viewed simply as an exercise in abstract speculation; the day may well come when the issues addressed become crucial choices for America. Until now they have been discussed only within the smallest circle in the government; they deserve wider discussion.
—The Editors.

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have emerged in Moscow about the implications, for the Soviet Union, of the new U.S. policy toward China. One is relatively sanguine; the other, quite apprehensive. By examining these Soviet viewpoints, we can gain additional insight into the implications of U.S. China policy. Some Soviets apparently do not object to the recent improvements in U.S.-Chinese relations, in part because it seems impossible to them that Peking and Washington will ever achieve any substantial degree of political rapprochement, let alone any anti-Soviet cooperation. Some Americans may share this view. Two articles in *National Review*, for example, have advocated an arm's length U.S. policy toward Peking, characterized by coolness and caution, because the Chinese Communists are too unstable to do "serious business" with the United States.

The second Soviet school, however, seems deeply troubled by the general trend evident since 1971. Soviet authors have explicitly warned the U.S. government that becoming too friendly with Peking may well endanger U.S.-Soviet détente. This Soviet view may also have an American counterpart. For example, in 1973 a *New York Times* column by Harry Schwartz assessing U.S.-Chinese relations contained the comment, "In essence, a political foundation has been laid for a possible future Chinese-U.S. alliance against the Soviet Union." A year later, at least one Soviet author cited this same sentence as evidence of the sinister anti-Soviet objectives of the new U.S. approach toward China.

It is impossible, of course, to determine which school of thought is dominant within the Soviet politburo. However, it seems safe to assume that the two theories vie with each other for primacy, and that developments between Peking and Washington, as perceived in Moscow, can and do shift the balance between the two. By now, earlier Soviet apprehensions have probably diminished because of recurring Western media re-

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ports about a cooling off in U.S.-China relations. Two events strengthening this view were the Chinese cancellation of a scheduled visit by a performing arts troupe to the United States and President Ford's reaffirmation, after the fall of Indochina, of the U.S. commitment to defend Taiwan.

What Does Moscow Believe?

Nevertheless, the Soviet leaders could hardly become complacent about the future of U.S.-Chinese relations as long as almost total secrecy continued to surround Henry Kissinger's many meetings with Mao Tse-tung, Chou En-lai, and Teng Hsiao-ping. In fact, one Soviet diplomat told me he feared the devious Chinese had actually been the source of false information about this "deterioration" in U.S.-Chinese relations just to render Soviet leaders complacent about long-term Chinese plans to cooperate with the United States for anti-Soviet purposes.¹ Although some Americans might dismiss such Soviet fears as misdirected paranoia, Soviet newspapers, magazines, and radio broadcasts have regularly featured stories describing alleged secret U.S.-Chinese collusion against the Soviet Union. As bizarre or preposterous as it may sound to Americans, the Soviet press has reported, with all seriousness, joint operations by CIA and Chinese intelligence, secret meetings between Kissinger and Chou En-lai to divide the world into spheres of influence, and a budding U.S.-Chinese military relationship directed against the Soviet Union.

How reasonable are these Soviet allegations? Can anyone in Moscow seriously believe that Maoist China and Republican America could actively collude to oppose the Soviet Union? These questions can be better understood if first approached through Soviet eyes—by a brief review of what the Soviet media has been saying and by con-

¹Reminding one of the view expressed regularly in the early 1960s by Americans of right-wing political persuasion that the Sino-Soviet split was a charade designed to lull the West into a false sense of security.

military and economic support for Tito's Yugoslavia after 1949 may affect current perceptions in Moscow about U.S.-Chinese détente. Then we can examine the hypothetical advantages and disadvantages to the United States that would come from pursuing the kind of military and intelligence cooperation with China that Moscow alleges has already begun.

In 1973, the Soviet Union began asserting that China had proposed a military relationship to the United States. In December, a Singapore newspaper mentioned this possibility for the first time, and the story was immediately carried in the Soviet press. Soon afterward, the Japanese Kyodo news agency correspondent in Moscow reported that reliable sources had disclosed the details of a Chinese request for U.S. military equipment. According to this article, during their Peking meetings in November 1973, Chou En-lai supposedly asked Kissinger for 20 jet fighters. When *Newsweek* then carried a story attributed to sources close to Kissinger that Peking had requested U.S. tanks, military transport aircraft, and armored personnel carriers, Moscow again showed intense interest. For example, a radio broadcast in English from Moscow to North America warned that:

... reports of Peking's interest in American supplies of arms reflect the desire of the most reactionary militaristic circles in the United States to support the aggressive hegemonic aspirations of the Mao group. These circles would like to cash in on the openly hostile attitude of the Chinese leadership toward the Soviet Union and the Socialist community as a whole.

One unofficial Soviet broadcast went further, by stating that the United States had actually set up a tank factory and a helicopter assembly plant in China.

For no publicly apparent reason, the Soviet media soon began to accuse the Chinese leadership of actively seeking and receiving support from the CIA. One broadcast cited

an article in the *Far Eastern* ^{Intelligent observers may protest at this} ^{not} *view* stating that Chinese diplomats in Vienna had visited a branch of Radio Free Europe to gather CIA material about domestic oppression in the Soviet Union. No Objection To Declassification in Full 2010/08/30 : LOC-HAK-120-8-1-8

Other Soviet broadcasts accused Peking of conspiring with the CIA in south Asia to carve a new state out of Bangladesh and India by supporting the Naga insurgency in the area and to overthrow the government of Nepal.

Early in 1975, a signed article in *USA* magazine by a Soviet China scholar again warned the United States against providing military assistance to China.

I personally presume that these particular Soviet allegations are untrue, but it is important to appreciate how memories of U.S. aid to Yugoslavia could affect Soviet perceptions today. A Chinese proverb cautions, "Once bitten, twice shy." It was over 25 years ago in mid-1949 that Washington went to Tito's aid when he was threatened by Soviet invasion. Within that year, President Truman and Dean Acheson quickly arranged development loans, an export license for a steel finishing mill, and diplomatic support for Belgrade's bid for a Security Council seat in the United Nations. Despite the prevailing atmosphere of militant anti-Communism, Truman released \$16 million of Mutual Defense Assistance funds to Yugoslavia which he justified to Congress in November 1950 as "help to preserve the independence of a nation which is defying the savage threats of the Soviet imperialists, and keeping Soviet power out of one of Europe's most strategic areas." Within a few weeks, Congress passed the Yugoslav Emergency Relief Act authorizing an additional \$50 million of economic and military assistance. Less than two years earlier, Yugoslavia had been perhaps the most pro-Soviet of all the Communist-dominated nations of Eastern Europe. One can imagine Soviet surprise at these dramatic and surprisingly quick reversals of U.S. diplomatic and defense policy.

overlook the obvious differences between U.S. aid for Yugoslavia in 1949 and U.S.-Chinese collusion against the Soviet Union in the 1970s. Yugoslavia's expulsion from Cominform had occurred just four days after the beginning of the Berlin airlift—not in a period of U.S.-Soviet détente. More importantly, Yugoslavia is a small, non-industrial power without the capacity or ambition to challenge the Soviet Union. At most, the Yugoslavs could aspire to delay briefly or deter marginally a Soviet strike. Moreover, Belgrade possessed neither nuclear weapons nor the intention of developing them. The People's Republic of China, on the other hand, is large, potentially threatening to the Soviet Union, already possesses dozens of nuclear missiles and jet bombers, and may intend to expand its challenge to Soviet influence on a worldwide scale.

Thus, to Americans, for Ford and Kissinger to replicate the Yugoslav policy of Truman and Acheson with respect to China may seem impossible. But Soviet estimates of how U.S. policy is made do not proceed from the same perceptions. A Soviet China specialist told me that one aspect of the Yugoslav/China analogy that does fit is wartime contingency planning. After all, a striking degree of military (and presumably intelligence) cooperation did develop between Belgrade and Washington in the early 1950s. After a small U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group was established in Belgrade, the military assistance program reached a total of \$500 million by 1955, largely for purchase of U.S. tanks and jet fighters and modernization of ground forces. The U.S. Army Chief of Staff visited Belgrade, and later there were consultations at the general staff level between the two military commands. Eventually, the Yugoslav general staff also engaged in consultations with their Greek and Turkish counterparts about modes of defense against Soviet invasion.

This sort of U.S.-China No Objection To Declassification in Full 2010/08/30 : LOC-HAK-120-8-1-8
planning seems quite plausible to some Soviet observers.

What Does China Want?

If the United States ever wanted to enter into a military relationship with China, there is still the other side of the question. Would China be willing? Superficially, one might assume that rigid Chinese ideologues would prefer a continuation of present policy or even a rapprochement with the Soviet Union rather than accept military aid from the U.S. capitalist devils. Yet the Chinese have categorized the Soviet Union for many years as a capitalist state—more precisely, a formerly Socialist country which has restored capitalism—with even greater imperialist ambitions than the United States. Moreover, while Peking has called for the overthrow of Brezhnev, who is likened to Hitler, it has not made similar calls for the overthrow of the U.S. government. Is it possible, then, that Peking's leaders might seek Western military equipment, defense technology, and intelligence?

China has been warning its population for nearly six years of the danger of a Soviet surprise attack, so one obvious motive would be to provide a quick fix for the relatively inferior Chinese army, navy, and air force in an effort to deter a Soviet invasion. There are two ways a U.S.-Chinese military relationship could aid the Chinese in deterring the Soviets. First, by upgrading their war-fighting capabilities with U.S. equipment of the types already mentioned in the Soviet stories—jet transports, armored personnel carriers, tanks, jet fighters—Peking would raise, at least marginally, the cost of a Soviet invasion of China. It seems unlikely, however, that China could afford the kind of massive arms purchases that would be required to establish even a degree of either strategic or conventional military parity with the Soviet Union. Expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars of scarce foreign exchange for U.S. military

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Peking as a second psychological type of deterrence which is much cheaper. Whether or not the United States actually grants any Chinese military requests in peacetime, Peking could significantly affect Soviet calculations about the degree of U.S. or Western support China might receive in the event of a Soviet attack.

As long as U.S.-Chinese relations remain cool and distant, Moscow may assume that Peking would neither ask for nor receive military support from any outside source even after a devastating Soviet conventional attack or a disarming nuclear first strike. If, either through public statements or "disinformation" passed through clandestine channels, the Chinese were able to convince Moscow that U.S. military and intelligence support has been promised to China in the event of a surprise Soviet attack, this would undoubtedly have a profound effect on the debate within the Soviet leadership. Soviet military planners would face a new and dangerous uncertainty: the possibility of wartime Western aid to China.

An additional Chinese motive might be to play upon the conspiratorial instincts of Soviet analysts. Because Chinese propaganda has consistently lambasted "collusion" between the United States and the Soviet Union, it is reasonable for Moscow to attribute to Peking the desire to "spoil" improved U.S.-Soviet relations. In fact, Soviet broadcasts in 1975 have accused Peking of seeking to provoke war between Moscow and Washington. One way to generate U.S.-Soviet friction would be for Peking to leak stories—perhaps through intermediaries—to create the impression in Moscow that a U.S.-Chinese military relationship exists.

What's Good for the United States?

Three advantages would accrue to the United States in any U.S.-Chinese military relationship:

1. The military payoff would serve as a concrete reward for the pragmatic Chi-

nese policy of establishing working diplomatic relations with the United States, a policy which may fall under attack within China after Mao dies. More specifically, a U.S. military assistance and sales program in Peking would begin to involve the influential Chinese defense establishment in a new diplomatic relationship with the United States by giving the Chinese military a stake—defense technology—in preserving good relations with America.

2. U.S. arms and technology transfers to China may aid in deterring a Soviet attack or further Soviet military pressure on China, forestalling a future Sino-Soviet war which could jeopardize world peace. Certain improvements discussed below in Chinese strategic forces could reduce the risk of Sino-Soviet nuclear war and insure a more stable nuclear balance without significantly increasing the Chinese strategic threat to us.

3. Increased Chinese military capabilities, especially if deployed near the Sino-Soviet border, could induce even greater Soviet deployments to military districts on the Chinese border than presently exist, tying down a greater percentage of Soviet ground, naval, and air forces. Approximately one-fourth of the Soviet army, navy, and air force are already located near China. Increases in Chinese military forces will bring corresponding decreases in Soviet forces available for combat against U.S. allies.²

These general advantages of U.S. military sales to China could be maximized while minimizing negative consequences by giving export licenses to U.S. private corporations only for sales of defensive or passive military systems to China. Defensive or passive weapons systems can be defined in

² Soviet military planners presumably allocate a certain portion of their strategic and conventional forces to be "withheld" from combat against NATO as insurance against the contingency that a Chinese attack could open a second front. The size of this Soviet "China withhold" force is probably related to the Soviet estimates of what prudence requires to deter Chinese attack or, if deterrence fails, to defeat it. U.S.-assisted expansion of Chinese war-fighting capability thus increases the Soviet "China withhold" force.

a variety of ways, but two relevant examples would be a military reconnaissance system and a phased array or Over-the-Horizon (OTH) radar system. These systems might provide strategic and tactical warning to Peking's highest military authority for command and control of nuclear forces in the event of a Soviet surprise attack. Although China is already constructing a weather satellite system and a phased array radar system that may be ready within a few years, U.S. technology transfers to these two projects could permit earlier completion dates.

Moreover, if China genuinely believes its own propaganda statements about the urgent necessity of preparing for a Soviet surprise attack, then Peking may be interested in acquiring a "hot line" capability to receive U.S. tactical warning of Soviet missile or air attacks. The present arrangement of liaison offices in Peking and Washington probably does not allow the kind of rapid data link transmissions of advance warning required to give Peking time either to begin slowly fueling its liquid-fuel missiles or to permit launching of its jet bomber nuclear retaliation forces. Without this warning, Chinese liquid-fuel missiles at "soft" launch sites will remain vulnerable to Soviet disarming first strikes.³

³ That is, unless the Chinese missile sites or the Chinese missiles and their nuclear warheads are hidden from Soviet satellite reconnaissance and are therefore able to ride out a nuclear attack. Even if this were the case, the Chinese may be uncertain about how many of their sites remain unknown to Soviet intelligence or invulnerable to heavy Soviet ICBMs. Soviet espionage activities in China, exposed by Peking in January and March 1974, may have had the objective of locating Chinese missile sites, missiles, and warhead storage centers in northern Manchuria and northern Sinkiang near the Soviet border. Peking announced in January that the espionage activities of Li Hung-shu were centered near the Manchurian cities of Mu-tan-chiang and Chia-mu-szu. These two cities are possible choices for Chinese medium-range missile sites to threaten the major Soviet far east cities of Vladivostok and Khabarovsk. If Moscow could acquire by espionage a list of all Chinese missile sites and their precise geographic coordinates, the effectiveness of Peking's nuclear deterrent would be sharply reduced. China would then be more vulnerable to a successful disarming first strike. It is interesting to speculate that when Lin Piao fled to the north, he perhaps carried not only transcripts of the Kissinger/Chou En-lai conversations, but also a map of Chinese nuclear sites.

A U.S. strategic relationship with China, limited to this type of passive, defensive military technology, might bring some of the general advantages listed, *at minimal damage to U.S.-Soviet relations*. For example, a U.S.-Soviet "hot line" at least theoretically capable of providing warning to the Soviet Union already exists. A parallel U.S. arrangement with China could hardly provoke Soviet charges of favoritism toward China. Since the Soviet Union already has powerful phased array and OTH radar and advanced satellite reconnaissance systems, U.S. policy could remain "evenhanded" by supplying China only with systems carefully chosen to be of no interest to the Soviet Union, but still beneficial to China's more backward radar and satellite programs.

An additional advantage may stem from sales of strategic and tactical warning systems to China because of the crisis instability of the Sino-Soviet nuclear balance. A grave Sino-Soviet political crisis akin to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis might induce Peking to alert its strategic missiles and launch its strategic bombers. Without a tactical warning capability, the Chinese would have to keep their liquid-fuel missile force in a condition of high readiness, a dangerously destabilizing act that could provide incentives to Moscow to strike first. The Chinese would also have to consider a first strike before their forces were destroyed on the ground by a Soviet pre-emptive strike. With reliable tactical warning, however, Peking would be less inclined to fuel its missiles in a crisis and could rely instead on its recallable manned bombers as a second-strike force. A guarantee of 15 minutes' warning time, combined with runway alert procedures for the Chinese bomber force, would improve the stability of the Sino-Soviet strategic balance. In addition, timely and imaginative U.S. crisis diplomacy via our "hot lines" to Peking and Moscow (which they do not have between them) might damp down dangerous Sino-Soviet hostilities.

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The question may be raised whether U.S. leaders would actually provide warning of Soviet attack or whether Chinese leaders would find such U.S. messages credible during a Sino-Soviet crisis. Just as some Americans would doubtlessly call for non-involvement and "evenhandedness" in this situation, so would some Chinese leaders be extremely suspicious of any U.S. intelligence warnings received in Peking which could not be verified by Chinese-controlled systems or based on U.S.-Chinese mutual trust built up incrementally over time. Without any capability for independent verification of U.S. intelligence warnings, Chinese leaders might fear either U.S.-Soviet collusion to furnish misleading information to lure China into a Soviet trap or a U.S. plot to foment a Sino-Soviet war.

How Do We Get Started?

A wide range of possibilities exists from which to select initiatives that would encourage development of a U.S.-Chinese military relationship.

1. One initiative would be an *exchange of military academy delegations, defense attachés, and even defense ministers*. The Rumanian Defense Minister visited Peking, for example, just after signing a treaty with the Soviet Union, signaling that Rumania intended to balance its relations with China and the Soviet Union.

2. *U.S.-Chinese intelligence exchanges* about the Soviet Union through covert channels, including both direct contacts and secure radio communication lines, could be another first step. One channel already technically available could be established by leasing a satellite communication line from RCA Global Communications, Inc. for code transmissions on a round-the-clock basis.

3. *Limited military assistance* to the Chinese would have to be carefully selected to maximize its anti-Soviet utility to China while minimizing any consequences potentially harmful to the security interests of the United States and Asian allies.

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4. Allied military sales.

Acheson handled the first stages of U.S. military assistance to Yugoslavia in 1949-1950 by concerting with London, a U.S. approach to our allies could encourage their limited support for Peking. In 1974, rumors of Chinese interest in British V/STOL Harrier jet fighters, Rolls-Royce military jet engines, and French Super Frelon helicopters appeared in newspapers. The United States could encourage Britain, France, West Germany, and Japan to permit other selected, controlled military technology transfers to China such as, for example, allowing Chinese specialists to study the French nuclear submarine construction program and to consult with Rolls-Royce jet engine experts.

Perhaps fearing that the United States may have begun to either consider these ideas or even discuss them in secret with the Chinese, Soviet diplomats in the United States have already begun to make the case against any U.S.-supported increase in China's defense capabilities, saying that it would:

- 1. Poison the atmosphere of U.S.-Soviet détente and strengthen the hand of those Soviet leaders who believe the United States cannot be trusted;
- 2. Stimulate Soviet military leaders to call for a pre-emptive attack on China before Western arms arrive;
- 3. Eventually (after Mao dies) fall under control of anti-American Chinese leaders and be used against U.S. allies and U.S. national security interests in Asia;
- 4. Embolden the Chinese leadership to take more provocative military risks in any future crisis, thus increasing the probability of Chinese involvement in armed conflicts.

Should we assume that Moscow flatly opposes any improvement in U.S.-Chinese relations? Probably not. Supplying China with 100 B-52 heavy bombers would obviously elicit a different Soviet reaction than the sale of a small number of helicopters, radar components, or high resolution satellite cameras. Also, since Moscow denies it

NATO, the Soviets could hardly object to joint military contingency planning that would raise the costs to the Soviets of invading China or NATO.

Nevertheless, Moscow has apparently made its position perfectly clear. An item in the July 1975 issue of the American monthly *Air Progress* asserts that Brezhnev recently told Prime Minister Harold Wilson in Moscow that, as a precondition for a British-Soviet trade deal, London must refuse to sell the new V/STOL Harrier jet fighter to Peking. The British agreed. Whether Moscow will ever feel similarly obliged to interfere in U.S.-Chinese relations remains to be seen. Before this happens, our immediate need is for serious analysis of the future direction of the China policy begun by Nixon and Kissinger. In the end, publicly voiced Soviet fears may suggest new U.S. options that will increase stability in the turbulent Sino-Soviet conflict—the only relationship in the world in which two nuclear powers have shed each other's blood along a common border in a bitter ideological confrontation that shows few signs of amelioration.

Clearly, all these possibilities are directly related, from the U.S. point of view, to the state of U.S.-Soviet détente. If détente seems to be deteriorating, then the temptation to experiment with some of these initiatives would increase. A President more hostile to the Soviet Union and détente than Ford might be particularly attracted to the idea, risky as it is, of forging a close U.S.-Chinese bond in the Pacific, perhaps embracing Japan, as a new form of anti-Soviet containment.

But we need not go to such extremes in considering future modes of U.S.-Chinese military relations. Less drastic alternatives are more attractive. We should modify the specious policy of "evenhandedness" which now governs exports of advanced defense technology. The same restrictions should not apply to both the Soviet Union and

China. China is not nearly as large a security threat to us as the Soviet Union is. To maintain a rough parity in the global triangle of power, we need a policy which explicitly recognizes that Peking has a legitimate interest in improving its deterrence against the threat of Soviet attack. Despite Soviet denials of hostile intent we view with much concern the increase of Soviet armed strength near the Chinese border from 15 divisions in 1968 to nearly 50 in 1975. Any U.S. initiatives or responses to Chinese requests, moreover, must be based on an appreciation of the danger to the West of an unstable Sino-Soviet nuclear balance. We should reject the current blind public policy of blanket prohibition of defense technology transfer and intelligence sharing with Peking and instead require only that two conditions be met for any item or information Peking seeks:

1. It must enhance those Chinese defense capabilities which we believe will help deter Soviet military pressure on China without increasing offense capabilities which threaten U.S. allies in Asia;

2. It must not unduly alarm Moscow about U.S. intentions and thereby jeopardize U.S.-Soviet détente.

Many requests might meet these conditions, including technology which has both civil and military applications. For example, the same kinds of advanced underwater listening equipment China needs for offshore oil exploration will also enhance Peking's antisubmarine sonar detection capability. This would be useful against the Soviet submarine fleet in the Pacific which has long threatened the naval forces and merchant shipping of China, Japan, and the United States.

CUBA: TIME FOR A CHANGE

by Abraham F. Lowenthal

For the first time in years, the United States and Cuba have a chance to break the deadlock which has kept such close neighbors so far apart. The outcome of the San José meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) this July means that the United States is now free to determine its own stance toward Cuba. For its part, Cuba is ready to compromise to achieve rapprochement with the United States. "Normalization"—mutually respectful and profitable diplomatic, commercial, and cultural relations—is at last possible, perhaps within two or three years.

The road to normalization will be long and cannot be one-way. Traveling it successfully will require patience, skill, and flexibility on both sides. Neither country desperately needs improved relations, though each nation would gain substantially, both in bilateral terms and in the broader framework of inter-American and international relations. Each country will encounter formidable internal problems as it moves toward nonhostile relations. Each (especially the United States) must contend also with allies who will be unenthusiastic about a U.S.-Cuban rapprochement. But the will to face internal and external difficulties to achieve normalization exists in Havana, both at intermediate and at high levels of government. In Washington, a similar spirit prevails at intermediate levels in the executive, and is gaining increasing strength in Congress.

Despite some signs in Havana and in Washington that normalization is desired, however, U.S.-Cuban relations are still log-jammed, if not icebound. Each side waits for the other to make concessions before direct negotiations begin. Cuba has already